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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002033

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PHUM PTER PGOV I2 IR

SUBJECT: MEK IN CAMP ASHRAF: VIOLENT CLASHES LEAD TO DEATHS AND INJURIES

REF: BAGHDAD 2027 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Robert Ford for reasons 1.4(b)&(d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Violent clashes between GOI forces and residents of Camp Ashraf entered their second day. USG officials met with GOI Ashraf Committee Chairman Ali Abdul Amir al-Yassery to stress the importance of the GOI fulfilling its commitment to the USG to treat camp residents humanely and to propose a possible halting of engagements to allow for an assessment of injuries and deaths by U.S. forces. USG officials also requested a 48-hour cooling-off period to allow for possible negotiation between the GOI and the camp residents. The PM approved the halting of engagement for a medical assessment, but denied the cooling-off period claiming that, by establishing an Iraqi Police (IP) station on Camp Ashraf, the GOI had achieved its goal of asserting its territorial authority over Camp Ashraf. U.S. military on the scene confirm that seven Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MEK) members are dead and over two hundred have been injured. MNF-I Chief-of-Staff (COS) raised the cooling-off period with the PM's COS late on July 29 by the PM's COS refused to intervene. CDE will see PM COS on July 30 to press this issue again. We expect more clashes tomorrow. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On July 29, sporadic violent confrontations continued between the GOI and the residents of Camp Ashraf. TF-134 reported witnessing Iraqi forces using a tactical vehicle to drive over some of the residents during the confrontation and striking residents using batons and other means in order to subdue them. Based on American and Iraqi reports of the late July 28 clashes, the GOI used untrained infantry forces as reinforcements, rather than specially trained riot control forces, to engage the residents. Their deployment resulted in shots being fired upon the residents and a possible escalation of violence. Al-Yassery, from the PM's office, on July 29 confirmed this pattern to EmbOffs.

¶3. (C) During a July 29 meeting with USG officials, al-Yassery claimed the camp was quiet and the GOI forces were no longer engaging camp residents. He asserted the IP station had been established on the camp. Additionally, he claimed that 30 members of the Iraqi forces and 20 camp residents were injured. When pressed by USG officials about the number of deaths, he claimed no camp residents had died as a result of the clashes. USG officials requested a cessation of hostilities in order for U.S. (and possibly Iraqi) forces to enter the camp hospital to assess injuries and fatalities resulting from the clash. They also requested a 48-hour cooling-off period to allow for possible negotiation between the residents and the GOI. Al-Yassery relayed our request to the PM who agreed to allow the hospital visit, but denied the cooling-off period stating the GOI had achieved its goal by asserting its sovereignty over Camp Ashraf. The local GOI commander declined to join U.S. forces in the medical assessment.

¶4. (C) Following the July 29 meeting with al-Yassery, at approximately 1600, TF-134 entered the camp hospital, after obtaining permission from the GOI, to assess the extent of the camp residents' injuries. They reported seven fatalities and over 200 injured persons. The camp residents have requested blood and other medical supplies to treat their injured. Immediately after the visit by U.S. forces, the Iraqi Army (IA) commander informed members of the TF-134 that QIraqi Army (IA) commander informed members of the TF-134 that IA forces could no longer communicate with U.S. forces.

¶5. (C) Late on July 29, MNF-I COS asked Tareq Abdullah, the PM's COS, to facilitate a 48-hour cooling-off period. Abdullah refused saying the Iraqi government has the sovereign right to enforce its police authority as it sees fit. CDA is scheduled to meet Abdullah July 30 morning and will press again for at least a temporary halt in GOI reinforcement of its forces already in the camp. CDA will also urge that the GOI allow its local commander, COL Sa'di, to talk to the MEK again.

¶6. (C) Comment. The GOI has underestimated the MEK's resolve and their willingness to resist the placement of an IP station on Camp Ashraf with violence. They did not provide sufficient forces to maintain control over the camp residents. Instead they rushed additional forces, consisting of infantry rather than riot control forces, to the point of engagement. Once these untrained forces clashed with the residents, who were responding in a violent and determined manner, they overreacted and began firing. (Note: It appears some members of the Iraqi forces chose to ignore the direct order by the PM to engage the MEK without ammunition (reftel). End Note.) Subsequent GOI assertions of no further

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need for planning, including on the PM's part, suggests the GOI still underestimates the complexity and depth of the challenge they face at Ashraf. We foresee further clashes over the next few days. End Comment.

FORD